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Quality Healthcare: Washington State Collaborative and Changing Systems

Problems with the current healthcare system	1
Ideal delivery system	2
Achieving an ideal delivery system.....	2
What is a Collaborative?	2
How does the Washington State Collaborative work?	3
Why participate?	4
How do you get involved?	5
The time for quality is now	6
Take charge of your system	7
References	7

This white paper was written to engage senior healthcare management in system changes that are necessary to produce quality healthcare in today's market. Senior management must be the leaders in these changes. This paper outlines a system approach to redesigning the delivery of healthcare. It also explains the reasons for, and benefits of, a system redesign.

Problems with the current healthcare system

Chronic disease has become a national epidemic. Recent estimates suggest that well over one hundred million Americans suffer from one or more chronic illnesses.¹ Rapidly aging populations are living longer as a result of significant healthcare advancements. At the same time, chronic conditions are now the leading cause of illness, disability, and death in the United States. They affect almost half of the U.S. population and account for the majority of healthcare expenditures.²

As the prevalence of chronic illness continues to increase, the current healthcare system in the United States is not designed to effectively treat chronic, lifelong illness. These inadequacies were articulated in a report published in 2001 by the Institute of Medicine. *Crossing the Quality Chasm: a New Health System for the 21st Century* outlines specific flaws in today's healthcare system.³ Such flaws include rushed practitioners not following practice guidelines; lack of care coordination; lack of active follow-up to ensure the best outcomes; and inadequate patient training to manage illness.

Participation in this Collaborative provides an opportunity and forum to focus on redesigning your healthcare system

Today's healthcare system does not, as a whole, make effective use of its resources. According to Improving Chronic Illness Care, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, fee-for-service payment presents the biggest single barrier to improving chronic illness care and reducing costs. It rewards high-tech treatments when people with chronic illnesses need and want low cost information, comfort, and guidance.

What is the ideal delivery system that provides quality healthcare?

Systems are perfectly designed to get the results they achieve.

According to Donald Berwick, MD, MPP, CEO and president of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, quality is a system property; the only way to improve quality healthcare delivery is to completely redesign the entire healthcare system. Berwick says the characteristics of an ideal system that provides quality healthcare are

- a “continuous healing relationship,”
- regular clinical assessments of patients,

- effective clinical management, and
- information and ongoing support for self-management.

The challenge lies in the ability to achieve these qualities.

How can an ideal delivery system be achieved?

One system approach that has improved healthcare delivery throughout the state of Washington is the Washington State Collaborative. Participation in this Collaborative provides an opportunity and forum to focus on redesigning your healthcare system.

What is a Collaborative?

A Collaborative is a systematic approach to healthcare quality improvement in which organizations test and measure practice innovations. Through sharing their experiences, primary care practices accelerate learning and spread the implementation of best practices. In 1995, the Institute for Healthcare Improvement held the first Breakthrough Series Collaborative. Since then, more than 700 teams from over 450 United States and Canadian healthcare organizations have participated

in a Collaborative.⁴ Through participation in three Washington State Collaboratives, 65 primary care teams across the state have focused on improving care in diabetes and preventive services.

How does the Washington State Collaborative work?

The Washington State Collaborative (WSC) is based on the **Breakthrough Series Model** developed by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. This model develops a network of experts through clinical practice teams. WSC participants spend 13 months setting goals, testing and fine-tuning small changes within their system, and spreading successful improvements throughout their delivery system.

Collaborative participants use the **Care Model (Chronic Care Model)** to focus on their system change efforts.⁵ This evidence-based model identifies the essential components of a system that encourages high-quality chronic disease management. Those components include community resources and policy, health system

organization, self-management support, delivery system design, decision support, and clinical information systems. To learn more about the Care Model, visit www.improvingchroniccare.org.

Focusing on these components will foster productive interactions between patients who take an active part in their care and providers who are supported by resources and expertise. The results of these interactions are evident: improved functional and clinical outcomes.

The methodology by which all WSC participants implement the Care Model is through the **Model for Improvement**.⁶ Initially designed as a framework for accelerating improvement in a variety of business contexts, the Model for Improvement has been adapted for healthcare systems. The Model enables participants to rapidly test and implement changes to their systems using a plan-do-study-act method. For more information about the Model for Improvement, visit www.qualityhealthcare.org.

For more information about the Care Model visit www.improvingchroniccare.org

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Health plans and providers are piloting financial incentive programs for improved quality disease management outcomes

Why participate in the Washington State Collaborative?

Healthier patients and higher quality care

Clinical teams have used their WSC participation to redesign their clinical system and increase the quality of care for their patients. The results of each WSC have included significant measurable improvements in patient populations. For example, teams in the Washington State Diabetes Collaborative II (Feb. 2001–Mar. 2003) demonstrated the following improvements in their diabetes patients in only 13 months:

- 76% of teams showed improvement in HbA1c < 8%
- 68% increased percent of patients with blood pressure < 140/90 mmHg
- 93% increased percent of patients with an LDL cholesterol < 130 mg/dl

Increased revenue potential

Clinical systems with effective chronic disease management programs not only see improved patient health, they also may be rewarded financially for their

efforts. Clinical systems and health plans have responded to patients with chronic illnesses by creating disease management programs that help patients effectively manage their disease. Through WSC participation and continual process improvement, providers can distinguish their disease management program and articulate the benefits of receiving care at their facility. Health plans and providers are piloting financial incentive programs for improved quality disease management outcomes.

Patient satisfaction

Past WSC participants have reported increased patient satisfaction after they adopted the Care Model in their facility. Patients of clinics who have participated in the WSC expressed their appreciation for providers and staff who listened to their concerns. Patients also gained improved outcomes by setting goals and receiving feedback from the clinic staff. For example, one patient noted, “I’m not meeting all my goals yet, but planning with a doctor makes it better. It feels like two of us are working on it and two of us are cheering me on.”

Provider satisfaction

Through WSC participation, providers have reported their systems are more efficient, more effective, and better suited to meet the needs of their patients. WSC participation gives a team of providers and clinic staff the effective tools and a network of peers to provide quality healthcare. With the proper tools, each team member takes on a meaningful role for patient care.

“I find that caring for patients with diabetes is now much easier for me and much more rewarding. Our patients notice that we are more engaged with them in managing their chronic illness.”

Bertha Safford, MD, Medical Director of Quality Improvement, Family Care Network, Bellingham, Washington

Access to local quality improvement resources

WSC participation facilitates access to local resources and expertise. One of the most valuable tools available free of charge to WSC participants is an electronic registry software program that allows providers to track, manage,

and coordinate patient care. This program can generate reminder letters and provider reports to assist staff and senior administration in the delivery of consistent, high quality care over time.

In addition to the registry software program, WSC participants are able to benchmark and compare their improvement efforts with other clinics throughout Washington. Previous participants praised the WSC for allowing them to network with fellow peers. Participants share their struggles and successes, which increases knowledge and ultimately improves patient care.

WSC participants may also access financial assistance to facilitate their WSC experience. This assistance has helped previous participants jumpstart their system redesign and become leaders of change within their clinical system.

How do you get involved in the Washington State Collaborative?

Commit to improving care.

One of the best ways to approach quality improvement and create system change is through participation in the WSC. Sending

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*WSC participation offers
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a team to participate can reinforce a clinical system's mission to deliver quality healthcare.

Gain support from senior management.

Senior management support plays an integral role in gaining the maximum benefits of WSC participation. Senior management provides the resources necessary to foster system changes. They must commit to intensive training for their multidisciplinary WSC team. Senior management also develops strategic plans to integrate WSC-initiated system changes throughout the organization.

The time for quality is now

“We’re going to have to improve chronic care one way or another...disease management is being emphasized from the health plans and from the state. We can no longer accept the status quo...”

*Rob Benedetti, M.D.,
Medical Director, Rockwood
Clinic, Spokane, Washington*

Dr. Benedetti's message states the obvious—chronic diseases continue to impact the health of Americans and they must be effectively managed. As health plans and public health officials continue to monitor chronic diseases, clinical systems need to take proactive measures to improve patient care. Participation in the Washington State Collaborative is one of the most effective ways to begin system changes.

WSC participation offers a cost-effective method to redesign your system. WSC participants receive ongoing consultation to continue their system changes with direction and coaching from local experts. WSC participants can also use their network of fellow participants to share valuable lessons.

With effective disease management tools and a network of quality improvement peers, providers are equipped to provide the best care possible to their patients.

Take charge of your system

For further information on the Washington State Collaborative and how you can redesign your clinical system, contact the Washington State Department of Health at (360) 236-3617 or Qualis Health at (800) 941-3415.

References

¹ Hearing Before the Health Subcommittee of the House Committee on Ways and Means, 108th Cong., 1st Sess (2003) (testimony of Ed Wagner, MD).

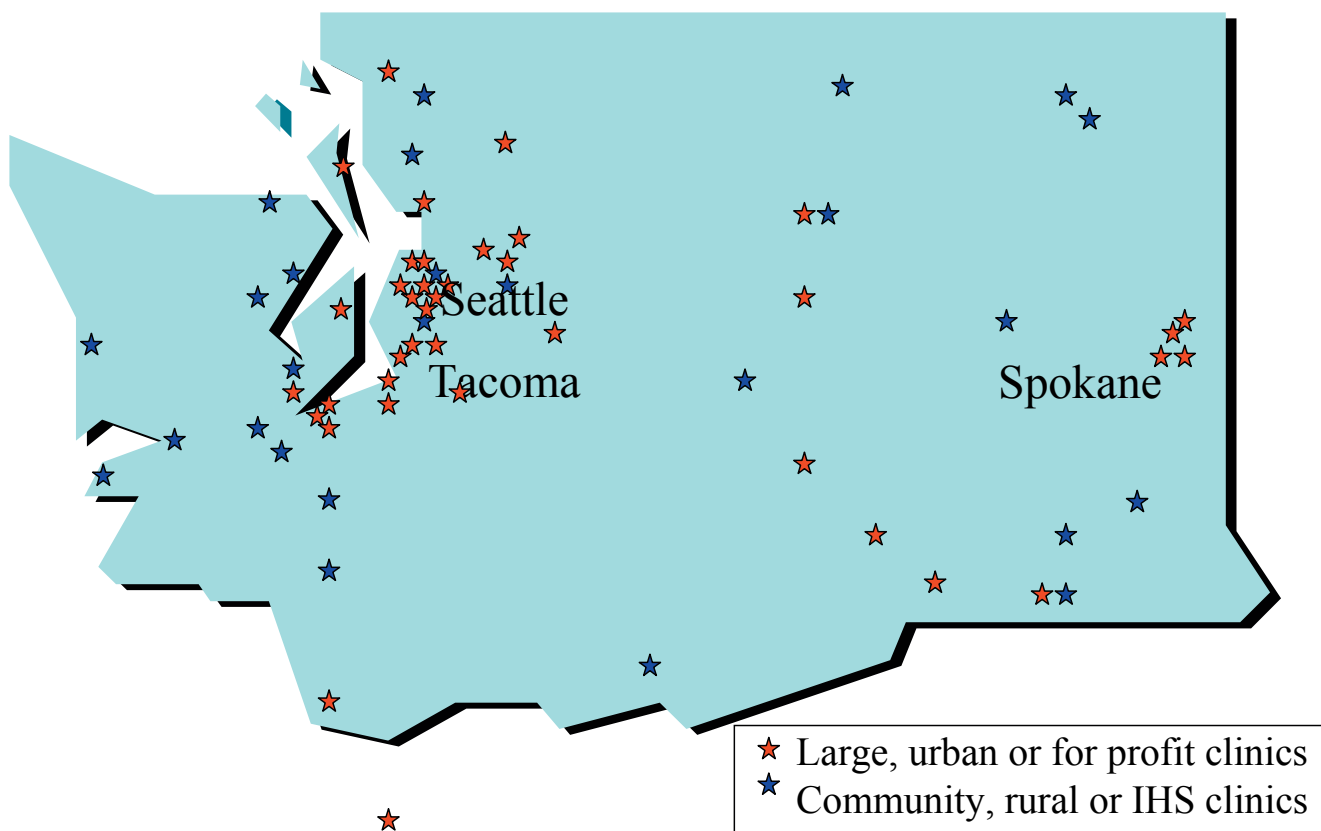
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³ *Crossing the Quality Chasm: A New Health System for the 21st Century*. Committee on Quality Health Care in America, Institute of Medicine Report. Washington D.C.: National Academy Press; 2001.

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⁵ Wagner E. Chronic disease management: What will it take to improve care for chronic illness? *Effective Clinical Practice*. 1998;1:2-4.

⁶ Colman C, Langley G, Nolan K, Nolan T, Provost L. *The Improvement Guide: A Practical Approach to Enhancing Organizational Performance*. San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996.



The Washington State Collaborative has brought together 65 primary care teams from across the state to focus on redesigning their systems while improving clinical care.

Take charge of your system. Join the Washington State Collaborative. Call the Washington State Department of Health at (360) 236-3617 or Qualis Health at (800) 941-3415.

